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Research Memorandum

REU-74, October 31, 1962

TO : The Secretary  
THROUGH: S/S  
FROM : INR - Roger Hillsman

SUBJECT: Western European Reactions to the Soviet Decision to  
Dismantle the Missile Bases in Cuba

By the morning of October 30 the following reactions to the Soviet announcement on October 28 of decision to withdraw the missile bases from Cuba had begun to emerge in Western Europe.

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The announcement of the Soviet decision to dismantle the missile bases in Cuba evoked great relief from governments, the press and the public throughout Western Europe. This feeling of relief was sustained through the two days following announcement of the decision. Almost marked was the feeling that the Soviet decision represented a major diplomatic victory for American firmness. There was a greater readiness now than before the Soviet announcement to accept the American view of the gravity of the threat the bases had posed to Western security, and there was widespread admiration for President Kennedy's handling of the crisis. To put it somewhat differently, the Soviet decision had the effect of confirming the American analysis of the strategic implications of the bases and justifying the strong line taken by the President.

On the other hand, there was considerable praise for Khrushchev, not exclusively confined to the left wing, and many were pleased that the UN would have a role in events. Some, particularly among the British press, feared that Khrushchev's position in the Kremlin might be jeopardized by the Soviet action and that he might be replaced by a harder-liner. Most Western European papers warned against crowing over Khrushchev, and almost all public figures refrained from doing so in public comments.

As to what lay ahead, there was wide agreement that negotiations on broad issues were likely to ensue, and a readiness in many countries to find in the outcome of the Cuban affair signs that these negotiations had a brighter chance of success than before. In some countries, however, notably Germany, there was a conviction that the Soviets might simply shift their offensive to another field and that caution was more than ever the watchword. And finally, although there were those who noted that the Soviet bases had not yet been dismantled, and that this would have to be the first order of business, for the most part there seemed to be little doubt that the Russians would proceed as promised.

In the North Atlantic Council, NATO representatives of a number of countries commended the President's handling of the situation. They

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considered that it was urgent to plan next moves, and the Belgian, Turkish and Greek representatives stressed the importance of NATO consultation.  
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A country-by-country analysis follows:

UK: The government, in its first comment, welcomed the Soviet decision and was especially pleased by Soviet acceptance of UN inspection for the dismantling. This latter point was repeated by the Government in the Queen's Speech from the Throne opening the new session of parliament. The Queen's Speech did not fail, however, to express the UK's "grave concern" over the introduction of offensive missiles into Cuba. The British press, which had by and large been critical of the United States during the earlier phases of the Cuban base crisis, was somewhat sheepishly congratulating both Kennedy and Khrushchev on the outcome and stressing the importance of exploiting this favorable break in a renewed search for peaceful solutions to outstanding problems. Labor spokesman Harold Wilson thought the Russians had secured their main objective, the "guarantee of the territorial integrity of a communist state on the borders of America." Many British newspapers saw in the Soviet acceptance of UN inspection favorable omens for gaining Soviet agreement to the on-site inspection principle in connection with nuclear test ban and surprise attack negotiations. Agitation by ban-the-Bomb groups fell off almost immediately following announcement of the Soviet decision.

France: "Official circles" attributed the Soviet decision (called "historic" by the state radio) to US firmness. They pointed out the need for an international control body to assure dismantling of the bases. These same officials were reported to be emphasizing that France would expect a place at the conference table if East-West negotiations on broader issues ensued. There has been no official government statement as yet.

Germany: Relief and applause for US firmness were heavily tinged with caution. Through official spokesman von Hase, the Cabinet expressed its continued concern with the situation and authorized the Minister of Defense to prepare special military readiness measures. Von Hase warned that in any negotiations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet retreat in Cuba could not be treated as a concession from the Soviet side. Both the SPD and the CDU, the former through a spokesman and the latter through its press service, emphasized that US firmness had brought about the favorable outcome in Cuba, and considered that if US determination had now been brought home to Khrushchev, this might improve the outlook for negotiations on other problems. The CDU specifically mentioned general controlled disarmament and the Berlin and German question as among these problems.

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Many in Germany, including the CPD and large segments of the press, thought there might be Soviet countermoves, but most papers were confident that President Kennedy had now found the most effective way to deal with the Soviets. There were few in Germany who expected a lasting relaxation of tensions.

These same views prevailed in Berlin, where Mayor Brandt warned against over-optimism even while expressing the hope that Berlin's situation might be improved by the Cuban base episode. The Soviets could at least no longer doubt the readiness of the United States to support its positions with strength. Press and public in Berlin were highly gratified by the turn of events. While they expected Soviet machinations against Berlin to continue, the wellsprings of their confidence in American strength and steadfastness were renewed. Officials and intellectuals thought the Soviets were now prepared to negotiate outstanding issues, and cautioned that they would have to be watched very carefully.

Italy: Prime Minister Fanfani's initial reaction to the Soviet decision, issued through a spokesman, was that it was "very positive." He said Italy would support the conciliatory efforts of the Secretary General of the UN. Fanfani asked the Embassy to inform Washington that he was "greatly pleased" with the turn of events. The Embassy thought one cause of his pleasure was that the easing of the crisis removed a serious strain from the center-left coalition he heads.

The Italian center, right and moderate left press was highly enthusiastic about developments, seeing American actions fully justified by events. One paper thought Khrushchev must be having difficulties in the Kremlin, and stated a preference for a "flexible Khrushchev in trouble" over missile-minded Malinowski.

Canada: Prime Minister Diefenbaker saw hope in the "early prospect that the threat to the Western Hemisphere from long-range Soviet missiles in Cuba" would be removed. He attributed the removal to "unity, understanding and cooperation" among the "Western Allies and mentioned Canada's pioneer role in preventing the shipment by air of bloc war material to Cuba. He saw no grounds for complacency or self-congratulations in the close brush with disaster. At the same time, he noted universal relief that the outlook for a peaceful solution of the Cuban problem had "greatly improved." and saw a "continuing need for negotiation on this and other potential sources of threats to world peace." He singled out the UN for special praise for its role ("forum for discussion", "good offices of Secretary General") and saw heavy responsibilities ahead for the world body. As to the future, he saw in "the negotiations which will follow the immediate settlement of the Cuban crisis" broad possibilities for progress in the settlement of other issues between East and West, particularly in the field of inspected disarmament.

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Diefenbaker, in a separate statement before the Canadian House of Commons, called for the speedy resumption of the Geneva Disarmament Conference and announced that Canada was prepared to contribute to an inspection team for Cuba.

Canadian Foreign Minister Green was a bit more cautious, emphasizing in an airport departure statement the fact that the dismantling of the Cuban bases was yet to be carried out and stressing the role of the UN in this action.

Opposition leader Lester Pearson expressed relief at the easing of the Cuban crisis but warned against dangers elsewhere, particularly in Berlin. If the settlement of the Cuban crisis led to reduction of tensions elsewhere, President Kennedy's firmness would be the reason, Pearson said. The door was open to negotiations, but they should be entered upon without illusions, and they called for wisdom, restraint, firmness and solidarity among the Atlantic Allies. Canada, as "an important member of this (Atlantic) coalition," could play an important role in the days ahead as she had in the past.

Others. Expressing their gratification in early reactions to the Soviet decision, the Danish Foreign Minister saw hope that "a final settlement" of the Cuban situation "in peace" might be in the offing, and the Norwegian Prime Minister's relief at the end of the crisis was undisguised. The press organ of the Norwegian labor movement had equal praise for the President and Khrushchev.

In Belgium, Foreign Minister Spaak "thanked and congratulated" Khrushchev for his positive response to President Kennedy's proposals.

No official statement was issued by the Austrians, Swedes or Finns. The Austrian and some elements of Swedish press in early reaction felt the Soviet decision to withdraw represented a major capitulation and a great victory for US policy, but some Swedish papers thought Moscow might have gained something or had not yet shown its hand.

[The Chief of the Finnish General Staff] reportedly remarked in a private conversation that the US was justified in quarantining military shipments. He said his only concern was that US policy might soften.

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There was little reaction as yet from The Netherlands. One newspaper (De Telegraaf-independent) admired Kennedy's statesmanship and Khrushchev's realism in recognizing that Kennedy was not bluffing. Another (De Volkskrant-Catholic) expected the West to be confronted with new Soviet tactics once Cuba was out of the way.

A Spanish official in Geneva called on the US representative to convey congratulations to the President on the Cuban developments, but warned of grave danger to the rest of Latin America as long as Castro remained in power.

There is as of this writing, on the morning of October 30, no information on reactions in Portugal, Iceland, Luxembourg or Switzerland.

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